

Permissions for close contact critical workers to return to worksite during quarantine period for COVID-19

12 January 2022



**Government of
South Australia**

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During times of significant COVID case numbers in South Australia there may be times when certain workers will be required to attend work despite being a close contact of a COVID case. These workers are referred to here as *close contact critical workers*. The explicit reason for this is to maintain a function critical to the South Australian community.

The requirement to return such critical or essential workers to the workforce during quarantine periods has already been seen and supported in health care, disability care and aged care. Allowing close contacts who are critical/essential workers to continue working needs to be balanced with the risk of further disease transmission in worksites which could lead to even greater disruption than what was originally being sought to be addressed.

To trigger this process, the workforce capacity to maintain a function needs to be under significant strain and alternative options for support need to be first exhausted. Any permission for returning close contacts to the workplace needs to be done carefully and in conjunction with comprehensive, risk mitigation plans based on multi-layered infection prevention and control. Whilst close contact critical workers are considered in these limited circumstances to be able to work, the health and wellbeing of the worker themselves, other staff members and the broader community remains of critical importance.

Work permissions for close contact critical workers should be time limited and regularly reviewed as the pandemic situation in South Australia evolves and stabilises. Where demand on service decreases to manageable levels, work permissions should be shifted back to standard quarantine requirements.

Which industries will this relate to in South Australia:

- > Defence
- > Energy
- > Water infrastructure
- > Waste management
- > Food manufacture and distribution (excluding retail and hospitality)
- > Emergency services
- > Veterinary services and animal welfare
- > Agriculture
- > Airports
- > Funerals/crematoria
- > Freight/logistics
- > South Australian courts and tribunals
- > Civil Construction
- > Critical maintenance on essential government infrastructure

Support from Government:

SA Health will provide guidance through the Chief Public Health Officer of the requirements for critical/essential workers to safely return to work during a quarantine period.

The following SA Government departments will support the following sectors in terms of decision making, direct provision of advice and ensuring compliance with the requirements.

- > Department of Energy and Mining (energy)
- > Department for Environment and Water (water infrastructure)
- > Environment Protection Authority (waste management)



- > Department of Primary Industries and Regions (food manufacture and distribution*, veterinary services, agriculture)
- > Department for Health and Wellbeing (funerals/crematoria, emergency services, assist with food manufacture and distribution, assist with aspects of water)
- > Department for Infrastructure and Transport (airports, freight/logistics, civil construction, critical maintenance on critical government infrastructure)
- > Attorney General's Department (justice)
- > Defence SA (defence industries)

[*note: this excludes hospitality and food retail businesses, for example, supermarkets, delis, cafes, restaurants, wineries]

The following sections set out the requirements for businesses seeking to retain close contact critical workers in the workplace, unless alternative industry or business-specific arrangements have been approved by SA Health.

Requirements of individual organisations/businesses:

- > The organisation/workplace must have a COVID business continuity plan in place which is fully operational and subject to compliance monitoring.
- > The organisation/workplace must have a COVID safe risk mitigation plan in place with comprehensive hierarchy of controls including, QR check-in, vaccination (including boosters) of workers, PPE (surgical face masks as a minimum), appropriate well ventilated spaces (outdoor preferred) for staggered meal/other breaks, physical distancing of workers, daily RAT, diligence with cleaning and hygiene particularly of shared equipment etc. This plan also needs to be subject to compliance monitoring.
- > Comprehensive record keeping regarding which casual contact critical worker/s have been granted work permissions need to be kept to allow SA Health to identify cases in the event of a workplace outbreak.
- > Provision of Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs), appropriate PPE (surgical masks as a minimum), training in infection prevention and control (including use and disposal of PPE).

Responsibilities of the Chief Executive (or equivalent) of the organisation/business:

- > That all other options for maintaining critical staffing have been exhausted including (shifting of staff to alternative positions, delaying leave, addressing any social factors that may prevent other staff attending work such as transport/childcare/accommodation etc)
- > Providing approval for each close contact critical worker to return to work during the quarantine period including ensuring adequate documentation is in place to support such decisions.
- > Ensuring that all elements of safe return to work are in place, including the safety of the worker and the safety of other workers in the facility.
- > The close contact critical worker should only be returned to a position where they do not come into direct contact with members of the public.

Requirements of the close contact critical worker:

1. The critical worker must be separated from the person who is positive with COVID and the 7-day quarantine period commences at the date of last contact with the COVID case.
2. The close contact critical worker must be fully vaccinated (including a third dose if eligible).
3. Must be completely free of all COVID-symptoms (including headache, sore throat, runny/blocked nose, difficulty breathing, muscle or joint aches and pains, fever/chills, cough, vomiting/diarrhoea, loss of taste, loss of smell or loss of appetite).
4. Must have undertaken a PCR test prior to returning to work (can return whilst awaiting PCR result as long as that day's RAT (Rapid Antigen Test) is negative and may continue if PCR negative).

5. Must maintain quarantine at all times when not onsite at work.
6. Must complete a RAT at the start of every shift they attend inclusive of a daily RAT for days 1-7 since last contact with a case. All RATs must be negative.
7. If symptoms develop, must not attend work and must obtain a PCR test immediately (work permissions will be suspended until the PCR returns negative).
8. Must not use public transport or other forms of shared transport to travel to work.
9. Must wear a surgical mask at all times at work (an N95 mask will be required if working in a setting with vulnerable people).
10. Must take meal and any other breaks alone and preferably in an outside space.
11. Only undertake critical work functions – this does not include for example staff meetings, staff social functions or professional development activities.



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